

VA Voluntary Service

NEWSLETTER

for the volunteers of the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York

March-May 2003 • Volume 3, Issue 1

A Year in Review

2002 was a successful year for the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York Voluntary Services Program. Dedicated to providing comprehensive quality health care services to our nation's veterans, the VA in conjunction with the VA Voluntary Services Program (VAVS) has supplemented the services offered to veterans through volunteer participation and donations. Our volunteers are our most valuable resources. Our volunteers' commitment and dedication to their assignments help ensure that veterans receive the very best in quality care.

Across Network 2, we have seen an increase in the number of regularly scheduled volunteers. Our established patient programs continue to reach all segments of our diverse patient population including: nursing home, geriatric, psychiatric, domiciliary, substance abuse and Alzheimer's. Over 490,000 volunteer hours were logged for our Network in 2002.

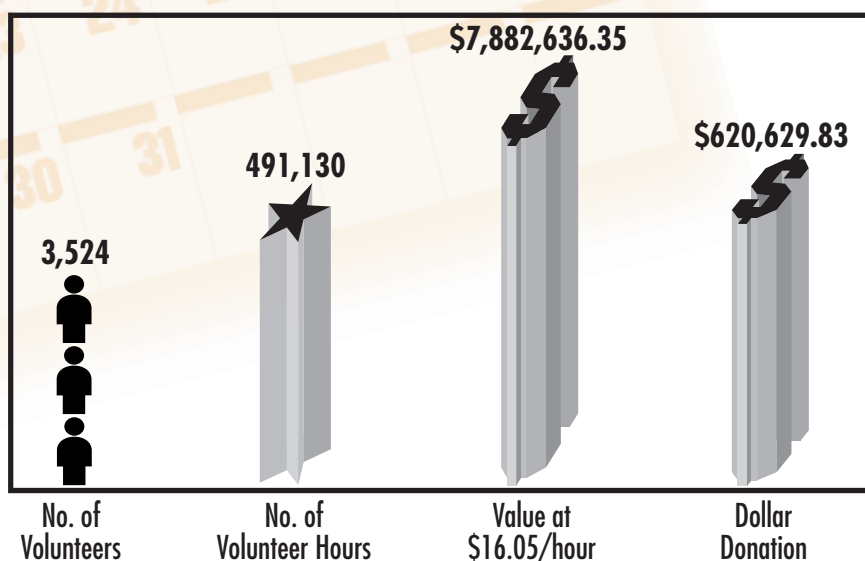
We continue to receive cash and goods for many of our needs. Oftentimes, many of these donations are received without solicitation. Many of programs would not be possible without your generous support. Thanks to your donations,

this past year we have been able to purchase: wheelchairs, clothing, household appliances, craft kits, refreshments, and much more. Your donations have helped fund: stand downs, the Volunteer Transportation Network, outreach events, emergency travel, and sending veterans to participate in the Winter Sports Clinic, Golden Age Games, Wheelchair Games, and Creative Arts Festival.

Through donations from numerous organizations, we have been able to fund the: USO Show, Holiday Gift Program, National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans events, POW/MIA Recognition Day events, Re-Creation Show, and Memorial Day salutes.

Our volunteer assignments continue to evolve. Some of the new and exciting volunteer opportunities include: pet therapy, primary care triage, laboratory assistant, craft cart, lobby musician, and cemetery honor guards. We continue to look for volunteers to help with a variety of clerical opportunities. As health care continues to shift from inpatient to outpatient care, we find ourselves looking for people to make reminder phone calls, assemble packets, fill orders, filing, answering phones, etc.

With your help and dedication, we have been able to provide the Network with more than \$9 million in services and goods in 2002! We look forward to an exciting and fulfilling 2003.



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Syracuse
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Pre-Vocational Apprenticeship Program,
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The VAVS newsletter has been created for all volunteers and potential volunteers of VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York. This publication is meant to showcase the wonderful work all of our volunteers contribute to VA. Please do not hesitate to contact anyone on the Advisory or Editorial Boards with your comments, corrections or suggestions.



Visit Our Network Web Site
www.va.gov/visns/visn02

Director's Message

National Volunteer Week, April 27 - May 3 is a special time set aside each year to acknowledge, recognize and honor our nation's finest volunteers. You play a vital role in VA's care of veterans, helping us provide veterans the quality service they deserve. Putting veterans first is our top priority - and you help make that a reality.

National Volunteer Week began in 1974 when President Richard Nixon signed an executive order establishing the week as an annual celebration of volunteering. Every President since has signed a proclamation promoting National Volunteer Week. Additionally, governors, mayors and other elected officials make public statements and sign proclamations in support of National Volunteer Week.



I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all of our volunteers. I want you to know how much

we appreciate your contribution of time, dollars and talent. Without you, many of our programs would not be possible.

Volunteers don't necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.

—Author Unknown

On behalf of everyone in Network 2, thank you for all that you do for our veterans.

Lawrence H. Flesh, MD
Interim Network Director

Network News

New Call Center

The Veterans Service Center (VSC) has a new call center for improved customer service. Now, if veterans have questions about billing, eligibility, or general application/registration questions, they can call a toll free number that will route their call to the next available VSC Clerk. The VSC telephone number for the Network is 1-888-823-9656. The call center is open Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Priority 8 Enrollment Suspended

Effective January 17, 2003 through September 30, 2003 - enrollment has been suspended for NEW veteran patients that fall into the Priority Group 8 category. In order to ensure VA has capacity to care for veterans for whom

our Nation has the greatest obligation - military-related disabilities, lower-income veterans or those needing specialized care like veterans who are blind or have spinal cord injuries - Secretary of Veterans Affairs, **Anthony J. Principi** has suspended additional enrollments for veterans with the lowest statutory priority. This category includes veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have higher incomes.

The suspension of enrollment affects only veterans in Priority Group 8, the lowest group in VA's eight-level system for setting health care priorities, who have not enrolled in VA's health care system by January 17. Priority Group 8 veterans already enrolled will be "grandfathered" and allowed to continue in VA's health care system.



Volunteer Opportunities

Albany

- Ambassador Greeter: greet veterans as they arrive by vans, get wheelchairs for those who need them, and escort them to clinic appointments
- Cemetery Information Booth: weekdays and weekends to staff the information booth at the entrance of the Saratoga VA National Cemetery
- Clerical Assistance: positions are available at the Clifton Park, Fonda, and Catskill outpatient clinics to assist the clinic staff with light office work
- Compensation and Pension: general clerical (call veterans to remind them of their exam appointments, filing) - good phone skills required
- Performance Management: provide support for general office functions (filing, data entry, photocopying, etc.)
- Pharmacy: weekdays and weekends to assist at the prescription pickup window and refill the "robot" automated dispensing machine
- Shuttle Drivers: openings on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday to drive patients in a government van from patient parking lot to front entrance



Bath

- Clerical Assistance - several positions available
- Computer Lab
- Drivers for Volunteer Transportation Network (Medical Center and Elmira Outpatient Clinic)
- Hospital Information Desk
- Library of Congress - Veterans History Project
- Nursing Home: working with small groups (games, arts and crafts, reading, etc.)
- Recreation: assist with bingo, games, and off station trips

Canandaigua

- Assisting with Recreational Activities
- Clerical Assistance
- Companion Therapy
- DAV/Volunteer Transportation Network: transporting veterans to and from their homes for medical appointments
- Golf Course
- Interaction with Dementia Clients: an orientation, monthly meetings, and ongoing training will be provided
- Patient Escort/Transport
- Performance Groups: musical, hobby, performance, etc. to perform for the patients
- Reminder Phone Calls: call patients for appointments at Rochester Outpatient Clinic and Canandaigua
- Special Care Companion Therapy: Palliative Care Ward

Syracuse

- Clerical/General: escorting, filing, making reminder calls, answering telephones, etc. at the Binghamton and Rome Outpatient Clinics
- Evening Escorts: transporting patients, delivery of specimens, etc.
- Pharmacy: deliver prescriptions (to wards); work at window dispensing filled prescriptions, mailing prescriptions, etc.
- Rehab Unit (Outpatient): scheduling appointments, reminder calls, filing, transporting patients back to floors, etc.

Western New York

- Activity Buddy Program - Nursing Home Care Unit - Batavia
- Clerical: filing, photocopying, running errands, mailings, paper shredding, etc. - Batavia and Buffalo
- DAV Volunteer Transportation Program: transport veterans to and from clinical appointments - Batavia and Buffalo
- Greeters: welcome veterans and visitors, help them get to all appointments and other related areas - Batavia and Buffalo
- Guest Parking Lot Shuttle: transport veterans and guests from cars to and from outpatient entrance - Buffalo
- Patient Escort/Transport Service: assist veterans to and from scheduled appointments and other needs as they occur - Batavia and Buffalo





News from...

Albany

Thanks to the generosity of many, Voluntary Service was able to purchase an **Electric Hi Lo Mat Table** for Physical Therapy. This table will be used in the Rehab Clinics to allow for safe transfers of our patients from wheelchair to exercise tables. The table moves up and down depending on the height of the chair and the strength of the patients. This movement provides a safe transfer for the patient and the therapist. A plaque on the table acknowledges the generous donors: American Legion Post 1797; American Ex-POW's Northeast New York Chapter; American Legion Post 701 in Amsterdam; Military Order of Purple Heart Chapter 118 of Amsterdam; and Italian American Veterans Post 35. We are grateful for the generous donations and support of our veteran service organizations and fraternal organizations that help us provide for needs that the Medical Center budget cannot meet due to budget constraints.

National Volunteer Week is April 27 - May 3. A Volunteer Recognition Ceremony will be held at the Italian American Community Center on April 27 at 1:00 p.m. Watch for your invitation and RSVP early, as seating is limited. On Tuesday, April 29, a Volunteer Week Social will be held at 10:00 a.m. in the Auditorium. We will honor all volunteers for their dedication and

present awards to volunteers who are unable to attend the formal ceremony. Please come and celebrate with us.

On Thursday, May 22, the **Jazz Band from West Point** will perform in the Auditorium at 10:30 a.m. for our hospitalized veterans, Adult Day Health Program, and Community Day Program patients. Voluntary Service is providing a welcome coffee and muffin break and the Veterans Holiday Committee will provide a pizza lunch for the performers. Volunteers and staff are welcome to attend the concert.

Bath

National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week was a tremendous success thanks to your efforts. A special thank you to all the volunteers, community members, and organizations that participated by visiting hospitalized veterans, hosting an activity, or sending a valentine.

A Veteran Employee Advisory Committee was recently formed at the Bath VA Medical Center. Veteran employees and local veteran representatives (such as members of the VAVS Committee) provide input to

local leadership to enhance services to veterans and encourage open communication. The committee would like us to promote a military presence within the facility by encouraging active duty and/or reserve personnel to participate in special events and programs that benefit hospitalized veterans. The volunteer staff saw this as a wonderful opportunity to promote the VAVS Program and agreed to take the lead in coordinating this initiative.



Nursing home veteran, Joe Smuskiewicz is pictured here with Senior Airman, Timothy Dunning who was home on leave from Altus, Air Force Base.

If you belong to a reserve unit or know of a service member home on leave, please contact the Voluntary Service office at (607) 776-4773. If you are interested in serving on the Veteran Employee Advisory Committee or would like additional information, please contact Sue at the number above.





News from...

Canandaigua

Thank you, volunteers! Throughout the year, Canandaigua Voluntary Service provides assistance to areas within the VA Medical Center and the Rochester VA Outpatient Clinic (ROPC) by soliciting and coordinating volunteers from our growing numbers of recruits. Our volunteers provide the “extras” to our veterans that the facility cannot. They assist the staff in feedings, engage in daily conversations, and provide patients with the encouragement and enthusiasm that allow them to pass the time with people who really care about their well being.

Along with providing invaluable time, our volunteers and organizations continue to donate monetarily and materially to the VA. They provide a continual inventory of lap robes that are knitted and crocheted for patients to brighten their rooms and keep them warm on those cold New York nights. Thousands of dollars are sent to the VA for a number of programs including the Holiday Program where gifts are purchased for more than 700 inpatients and outpatients.

National Volunteer week will be celebrated April 27 - May 3. During this week, to show our appreciation, refreshments will be available each day at Canandaigua and ROPC. The Volunteer Awards Banquet will be held on April 25 and separate “thank-yous” will be hosted throughout the VA - to

show our volunteers how much we appreciate their continued support and commitment.

So...volunteers...Thank you for your time. Thank you for your donations. And thank you for providing special care for special people!

*You're a very special person
Who helps in many ways
With your heartfelt efforts
That earn our highest praise*

*We appreciate the care
That goes into all you do
The world's a better place
Thanks to people like you.*

Syracuse

Long-time veteran advocate, volunteer, and friend, **Charles Dolson** passed away on December 28, 2002. Charlie was the Representative for the Veterans of Foreign Wars and former chairman and member on the Board of Directors at the State Veterans Home in Oxford. He also sat on the VAVS Executive Committee at our Medical Center. Charlie was also a volunteer at the Syracuse VA, serving over 24 years and had made himself a valuable asset to us. Charlie and his wife Bonnie, were one of the first recipients of the Syracuse VA's Veterans' Service Award



Charlie Dolson

and were singled out for their outstanding volunteer contribution to veterans and this Medical Center. Charlie's strong presence at any given activity showed how much he cared for and was devoted to the veteran. His giving nature was what volunteerism is all about. He provided the kind of care and service that we could not provide, and that is time and time well spent. Charlie could be counted on for anything, at any time. All we needed to do was pick up the phone and he was there. He will surely be missed.

Western New York

Student Volunteer Helps Make a Difference

Like many medical centers and nursing facilities, the physical structure can often look cold, impersonal, and “institutional.” Fortunately, caring staff and a very special student volunteer are making the VA Western New York Healthcare System at Batavia feel more like home each and every day.

Ashley McMorran, a senior at Notre Dame High School in Batavia, began volunteering this past summer to fulfill a community service requirement. As she began her assignment, Ashley pursued an idea to make scrapbooks based on individual patients' life. She made phone calls to patients' family members asking for stories about their loved one's hobbies

(see News from WNY page 8)





Wish Lists

Monetary donations to the General Post Fund to assist with a variety of patient needs and recreational activities are always accepted. Contact Voluntary Service for more information.

Albany

- ❖ Canteen Books (for haircuts)
- ❖ Denture Adhesive
- ❖ Newspaper Subscriptions
- ❖ Search-A-Word (activity books)
- ❖ Sneakers (mens - all sizes, new only)
- ❖ Funds for:
 - Assistive Listening Devices (\$100.90 each)
 - Wheelchairs (\$122.48 each)
 - New van for Volunteer Transportation Program
 - Sending patients to: Winter Sports Clinic, Wheelchair Games, Golden Age Games, and Creative Arts Festival

Bath

- ❖ Board Games
- ❖ Bowling Sponsors
- ❖ Canteen Books (\$.50 and \$1.00 denominations)
- ❖ CDs/Radios
- ❖ Coffee
- ❖ Craft Kits
- ❖ Duffle Bags
- ❖ Phone Cards
- ❖ Relaxation Tapes
- ❖ Snacks (for Hematology Clinic)
- ❖ Socks (new)

- ❖ Sponsors for Recreation Programs
- ❖ Stationary and Stamps
- ❖ Funds for:
 - Birthday Program
 - Emergency Travel
 - Gift Cards (for groceries)
 - Health Fitness Trail
 - Jump Start
 - National Golden Age Games
 - Vocational Programs (tuition support, uniforms, and exam fees)

Canandaigua

- ❖ Coffee (Decaf)
- ❖ Craft Items
- ❖ Disposable dinnerware (plates, bowls, cups, napkins, silverware)
- ❖ Gift Certificates (Wal-Mart, Wegmans, pizza places, McDonalds, Wendy's, movie theatres, etc.)
- ❖ Personal care items (shampoo, shaving cream, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, lotion, new socks, underwear, etc.)
- ❖ Pool Table
- ❖ Postage Stamps
- ❖ Sponsored Luncheons, Pizza Parties, Trips
- ❖ Tickets to Sporting Events and Outings
- ❖ Washer and Dryer
- ❖ Funds for:
 - Gladwin Gazebo
 - Recreation services
 - Storage and maintenance of pontoon boat
 - Palliative Care Rooms

Syracuse

- ❖ Coffee Service (\$40/year)
- ❖ Personal care items (toothpaste, shaving cream, razors, etc.)
- ❖ Satellite TV Program (1 year/ \$7,000)
- ❖ Telephones, TVs, VCRs
- ❖ Wheelchairs
- ❖ White T-shirts - various sizes
- ❖ Funding for:
 - National Rehabilitative Games
 - Quality of Life Fund

Western New York (Buffalo and Batavia)

- ❖ Coffee Cart Program
- ❖ DAV/Volunteer Transportation Program
- ❖ Fish Tank Maintenance
- ❖ Funding for Patient Activities
- ❖ Newspaper Subscriptions
- ❖ Patient Comfort Items
- ❖ Television (9" Color)
- ❖ Treadmills



Before purchasing any item, please contact the Voluntary Service to make sure that the item has not been already purchased/donated.





Calendar of Events

National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
Snowmass Village, CO

March 31 - April 5

National Volunteer Week
Various activities held at each site throughout the week.

April 27 - May 3

VAVS National Meeting
Indianapolis

April 30 - May 3

Albany

April 8
VAVS Committee Meeting
Auditorium

1:00 p.m.

April 9
POW Recognition Day
Chapel, 11th Floor

11:00 a.m.

April 27
Volunteer Recognition Ceremony and Banquet
Italian American Community Center

1:00 p.m.

April 29
Volunteer Week Social
Auditorium

10:00 a.m.

May 22
West Point Jazz Band Concert
Auditorium

10:30 a.m.

Bath

March
Women's History Month
Displays and schedule of events located in the hospital lobby.

March 4
Mardi Gras Party
Nursing Home Care Unit, Dining Room

2:00 p.m.

March 17
St. Patrick's Day Party
Nursing Home Care Unit, Dining Room

2:00 p.m.

April 3
AMVETS "Because We Care Day"
Leisure Room

2:00 p.m.

April 17
VAVS Meeting
Leisure Room, Bldg. 92

1:30 p.m.

May 26
Memorial Day Parade/Program

1:00 p.m.

Canandaigua

April 10
Pie, Plant, and Ice Cream Sale
Bldg. 5, Auditorium
Donations of pies, plants, and rummage sale items are needed.
This fundraiser supports Volunteer Award Banquet.

9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

April 25
Volunteer Recognition Banquet
Burgundy Basin Inn

11:30 a.m.

May 14
VAVS Committee Meeting
Volunteer Orientation immediately following meeting.
Bldg. 5, Auditorium

1:00 p.m.

Canandaigua holds bingo in Bldg. 5, Auditorium March 7, April 4, and May 2 at 7:00 p.m., as well as March 23 and April 13 at 2:00 p.m. Escorts are always needed 1/2 hour prior to start time. Call Hank Reigel at (585) 393-7370 if you are able to assist.

Syracuse

March 4
Creative Arts Program
Auditorium

11:30 a.m.

March 10
Raptor Project - Birds of Prey visiting
Auditorium

9:30 a.m.

March 14
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and
4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Spaghetti Lunch and Dinner
Sponsored by VAVS. Proceeds benefit 50th Anniversary of Medical Center.

Western New York

March 19
VAVS Committee Meeting
Buffalo - Room 301

1:30 p.m.

March 20
Veterans Service Officer Meeting
Batavia - Room 327E

10:00 a.m.

April 9
Former POW Recognition Day
Buffalo - Room 1109C

10:00 a.m.

May 1
Volunteer Recognition Ceremony
Batavia - Holiday Inn

6:00 p.m.

May 14
VAVS Committee Meeting
Batavia - Auditorium, Bldg. #4

1:30 p.m.

May 21
Volunteer Recognition Ceremony
Buffalo - Hearthstone Manor

12:00 p.m.

May 26
Memorial Day Observance
Batavia - Flagpole Area, Bldg. #3

8:30 a.m.

May 30
Memorial Day Observance
Buffalo - Room 301

2:00 p.m.





News from WNY (continued from page 5)

and interests, and later developed a colorful book for 10 of the 25 residents on Ward D.

"It helps start conversations with the patients. When the families come to visit their loved one, it provides a wonderful way for the family to remember the happy times together. The books belong to the patients. One patient passed away recently, and we sent his family book to the family, they really appreciated the gesture."

Ashley's mom, **Liz McMorran** who is a nurse at the VA, stated that the idea came from a technique called "Best Friends." This approach is often used when working with dementia patients. The caregiver(s) look at the patient as an old friend and relate to them through storytelling. "It shows compassion for the patients and it lets the family members know that we (staff and volunteers) have an interest and a respect for that person's life."

Veterans History Project Underway

The VA Western New York Healthcare System at Buffalo Veterans History Project is progressing well. World War II veterans continue to be interviewed and their oral histories preserved on tape. The Library of Congress formally introduced the Veterans History Project to the VA in November 2001. Since that time, veterans from all walks of life have been encouraged to step forward and tell their stories.

Adult Day Health Care Program Recreation Therapist, **Nancy Kaszynski** works on this project with two different veterans on the third Wednesday of the month. A special thank you to volunteers: **Joseph Panzarella, Thomas Erb, Christina Weber**. Also thanks goes to VA employee, **Jim Sheer**, as well as our distinguished veterans.



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